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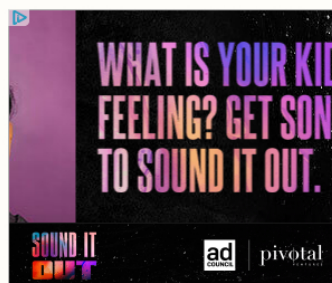
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ZAGREUS

Greek Name	Transliteration	Latin Spelling	Translation
Ζαγρεὺς	Zagreus	Zagreus	Great Hunter (z-, agreus)

ZAGREUS, "the first-born Dionysos," was a god of the Orphic Mysteries. He was a son of Zeus and Persephone who had been seduced by the god in the guise of a serpent. Zeus placed Zagreus upon the throne of heaven and armed him with his lightning bolts. The Titans, incited by the jealous goddess [Hera](#), sneaked into Olympos and offered the boy a collection of toys, tricking him into setting aside the lightning. They then seized and dismembered him with their knives. Zeus recovered Zagreus' heart and made it into a potion for Semele to imbibe who then conceived and gave birth to the second [Dionysos](#) as a reincarnation of the first.

The genitals of Zagreus were later recovered by the [Kabeiroi](#) ([Cabeiri](#)), two demigods of the island of Samothrake. They deposited these in a sacred cave on the isle and instituted the Samothrakian Mysteries in honour of the dead god.



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ZAGREUS SUMMARY

THE GOD ZAGREUS

Parents	Zeus and Persephone
God of	The Orphic Mysteries
Home	Thrace
Other Names	Sabazius

FAMILY OF ZAGREUS

PARENTS

[1.1] [ZEUS & PERSEPHONE](#) (*Orphic Hymns* 29 & 30; *Hyginus Fabulae* 155; *Diodorus Siculus* 4.4.1; *Nonnus Dionysiaca* 6.155; *Suidas* s.v. Zagreus)

[1.2] [HAIDES](#) (*Aeschylus Frag* 124)

ENCYCLOPEDIA

ZAGREUS (Zagreus), a surname of the mystic Dionysus (Dionusos chthonios), whom Zeus, in the form of a dragon, is said to have begotten by Persephone, previously to her being carried off by Pluto (*Callim. Fragm.* 171, ed. Benti.; *Etym. Magn.* s. v.; *Orph. Hymn.* 29; *Ov. Met.* vi. 114; *Nonnus, Dionys.* vi. 264). He was torn to pieces by the Titans, though he defended himself bravely, and assumed various forms; and Athena carried his heart to Zeus. (*Tzetz. ad Lycoph.* 355.)

Source: *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*.

ALTERNATE NAMES & TITLES

Greek Name	Transliteration	Latin Spelling	Translation
Σαβαζιος	Sabazios	Sabazius	(non-Greek)
Διονυσος Χθονιος	Dionysos Kthonios	Dionysus Chthonius	Chthonic Dionysus
Ευβουλιος	Euboulēos	Eubuleus	Well-Counselled



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THE GOD ZAGREUS

Aeschylus, Fragment 124 Sisyphus (from Etymologicum Gudianum 227. 40) (trans. Weir Smyth) (Greek tragedy C5th B.C.) :

"Now [I came] to bid farewell to Zagreus and to his sire, the Hospitaller."

[N.B. In this fragment Sisyphos describes his departure from the Underworld. Haides is the "Hospitaller of the Dead" and as husband of Persephone is the "father" of chthonic Zagreus.]

Diodorus Siculus, Library of History 4. 4. 1 (trans. Oldfather) (Greek historian C1st B.C.) :

"Some writers of myth, however, relate that there was a second Dionysos [Zagreus] who was much earlier in time than the one we have just mentioned. For according to them there was born of Zeus and Persephone a Dionysos who is called by some Sabazios (Sabazius) and whose birth and sacrifices and honours are celebrated at night and in secret, because of the disgraceful conduct which is a consequence of the gatherings. They state also that he excelled in sagacity and was the first to attempt the yoking of oxen and by their aid to effect the sowing of the seed, this being the reason why they also represent him as wearing a horn."

Diodorus Siculus, Library of History 4. 4. 5 :

"He [Dionysos] was also called Dimetor (Of Two Mothers), they relate, because the two Dionysoi were born of one father, but of two mothers. The younger one [Dionysos] also inherited the deeds of the older [Zagreus], and so the men of later times, being unaware of the truth and being deceived because of the identity of their names, thought there had been but one Dionysos."

Diodorus Siculus, Library of History 4. 5. 2 :

"He [Dionysos] was thought to have two forms, men say, because there were two Dionysoi, the ancient one having a long beard, because all men in early times wore long beards, the younger one being youthful and effeminate and young."

Diodorus Siculus, Library of History 4. 6. 1 :

"But the Aigyptians (Egyptians) in their myths about Priapos [i.e. the Egyptian god Min] say that in ancient times the Titanes (Titans) formed a conspiracy against Osiris [who was identified with Zagreus] and slew him, and then, taking his body and dividing it into equal parts among themselves, the slipped them secretly out of the house, but this organ alone they threw into the river, since no one of them was willing to take it with him. But Isis [Demeter or Io] tracked down the murder of her husband [or son in the Greek version], and after slaying the Titanes and fashioning the several pieces of his body into the shape of a human figure, she gave them to the priests with orders that they pay Osiris the honours of a god, but since the only member she was unable to recover was the organ of sex she commanded them to pay to it the honours of a god and set it up in their temples in an erect position. Now this is the myth about the birth of Priapos and the honours paid to him, as it is given by the ancient Aigyptians."

Diodorus Siculus, Library of History 5. 75. 4 :

"This god [Zagreus] was born in Krete (Crete), men say, of Zeus and Persephone, and Orpheus has handed down the tradition in the initiatory rites that he was torn in pieces by the Titanes (Titans). And the fact is that there have been several who bore the name Dionysos."

Pausanias, Description of Greece 7. 19. 4 (trans. Jones) (Greek travelogue C2nd A.D.) :

"The stories told of Dionysos [Zagreus] by the people of Patrai (Patrae), that he was reared in Mesatis [in Akhaia (Achaia)] and incurred there all sorts of perils through the plots of the Titanes."

Pausanias, Description of Greece 8. 37. 1 :

"From Homer the name of the Titanes (Titans) was taken by Onomakritos (Onomacritus) [Greek writer C5th B.C.], who in the orgies he composed for Dionysos [i.e. Zagreus] made the Titanes the authors of the god's sufferings."

Orphic Hymn 29 to Persephone (trans. Taylor) (Greek hymns C3rd B.C. to 2nd A.D.) :

"[Persephone] mother of Eubouleos [Zagreus], sonorous, divine, and many-formed, the parent of the vine."

Orphic Hymn 30 to Dionysos :

"Eubouleos (Eubuleus) [i.e. Zagreus], whom the leaves of vines adorn, of Zeus and Persephoneia occultly born in beds ineffable."

Orphic Hymn 46 to Licnitus :

"[Zagreus] from Zeus' high counsels nursed by Persephoneia, and born the dread of all the powers divine."

Clement, Exhortation to the Greeks 2. 15 (trans. Butterworth) (Greek Christian rhetoric C2nd A.D.) :

"[The early Christian writer Clement describes the myths of the Orphic and Samothrakian Mysteries:] The [Orphic] Mysteries (*Mysteria*) of Dionysos [i.e. Zagreus] are of a perfectly savage characters. He was yet a child, and the Kouretes (Curetes) were dancing around him with warlike movement, when the Titanes (Titans) stealthily drew near. First they beguiled him with childish toys, and then,—these very Titanes—tore him to pieces, though he was but an infant. Orpheus of Thrake (Thrace), the poet of the *Initiation*, speaks of the 'top, wheel and jointed dolls, with beauteous fruit of gold from the clear-voiced Hesperides.'

And it is worth while to quote the worthless symbols of this rite of yours in order to excite condemnation : the knuckle-bone, the ball, the spinning-top, apples, wheel, mirror, fleecel Now Athena made off with the heart of Dionysos, and received the name Pallas from its palpitating (*paltein*). But the Titanes, they who tore him to pieces, placed a cauldron upon a tripod, and casting the limbs of Dionysos into it first boiled them down; then, piercing them with spits, they 'held them over Hephaistos [i.e fire].'

Later on Zeus appeared; perhaps, since he was a god, because he smelt the steam of flesh that was cooking, which your gods admit they 'receive as their portion.' He plagues the Titanes with thunder, and entrusts the limbs of Dionysos to his son Apollon for burial. In obedience to Zeus, Apollon carries the mutilated corpse to Parnassos and lays it to rest . . .

The women who celebrate the Thesmophoria are careful not to eat any pomegranate seeds which fall to the ground, being of opinion that pomegranates spring from the drops of Dionysos' blood . . .

If you would like a vision of the *Orgia Korybantou* [i.e. the Mysteries of Samothrake] also, this is the story . . . [the two Kabeiroi (Cabeiri)] got possession of the chest in which the virilia of Dionysos [i.e. of Zagreus after his dismemberment] were deposited, and brought it to Tyrrhenia [i.e. the island of Lemnos], traders in glorious wares! There they sojourned, being exiles, and communicated their precious teaching of peity, the virilia and the chest, to Tyrrhenoi for purposes of worship. For this reason, not unnaturally some wish to call Dionysos Attis, because he was mutilated."

Pseudo-Hyginus, Fabulae 150 (trans. Grant) (Roman mythographer C2nd A.D.) :

"After Juno [Hera] saw that Epaphus [or Zagreus for both were identified with the Egyptian Osiris], born of a concubine, ruled such a great kingdom, she saw to it that he should be killed while hunting, and encouraged the Titanes (Titans) to drive Jove [Zeus] from the kinodome and restore it to Saturn [Kronos]

(Cronus)]. When they tried to mount to heaven, Jove with the help of Minerva [Athene], Apollo, and Diana [Artemis], cast them headlong into Tartarus. On Atlas, who had been their leader, he put the vault of the sky; even now he is said to hold up the sky on his shoulders."

Pseudo-Hyginus, Fabulae 155 :

"Sons of Jove [Zeus]. Liber [Zagreus] by Proserpina [Persephone], whom the Titanes (Titans) dismembered."

Pseudo-Hyginus, Fabulae 167 :

"Liber [i.e. Zagreus], son of Jove [Zeus] and Proserpina [Persephone], was dismembered by the Titanes, and Jove gave his heart, torn to bits, to Semele in a drink. When she was made pregnant by this, Juno [Hera], changing herself to look like Semele's nurse, Beroe, said to her : 'Daughter, ask Jove to come to you as he comes to Juno, so you may know what pleasure it is to sleep with a god.' At her suggestion Semele made this request of Jove, and was smitten by a thunderbolt."

Nonnus, Dionysiaca 4. 268 ff (trans. Rouse) (Greek epic C5th A.D.) :

"He [Kadmos (Cadmus) the future king of Thebes,] showed forth the Eulian secrets of Osiridos (Osiris) the wanderer, the Aigyptian (Egyptian) Dionysos [i.e. Zagreus]. He learned the nightly celebration of their mystic art, and declaimed the magic hymn in the wild secret language, intoning a shrill alleluia. While a boy in the temple full of stone images, he had come to know the inscriptions carved by artists deep into the wall."

Nonnus, Dionysiaca 5. 562 ff :

"Semele was kept for a more brilliant union, for already Zeus ruling on high intended to make a new Dionysos grow up, a bullshaped copy of the older Dionysos; since he thought with regret of the illfated Zagreus. This was a son born to Zeus in dragonbed by Persephoneia (Persephone), the consort of the blackrobed king of the underworld [Haides]; when Zeus put on a deceiving shape of many coils, as a gentle drakon twining around her in lovely curves, and ravished the maidenhood of unwedded Persephoneia; though she was hidden when all that dwelt in Olympus were bewitched by this one girl, rivals in love for the marriageable maid, and offered their dowers for an unsmirched bridal."

Nonnus, Dionysiaca 6. 155 ff :

"[Demeter hid her daughter Persephone away in a cave in Sicily to avoid the many suitors :] Ah, maiden Persephoneia! You could not find how to escape your mating! No, a Drakon (Dragon-Serpent) was your mate, when Zeus changed his face and came, rolling in many a loving coil through the dark to the corner of the maiden's chamber, and shaking his hairy chaps he lulled to sleep as he crept the eyes of those creatures of his own shape who guarded the door. He licked the girl's form gently with wooing lips. By this marriage with the heavenly Drakon, the womb of Persephone swelled with living fruit, and she bore Zagreus the horned baby, who by himself climbed upon the heavenly throne of Zeus and brandished lightning in his little hand, and newly born, lifted and carried thunderbolts in his tender fingers [i.e. Zeus marked him as his heir].

But he did not hold the throne of Zeus for long. By the fierce resentment of implacable Hera, the Titanes (Titans) cunningly smeared their round faces with disguising chalk, and while he contemplated his changeling countenance reflected in a mirror they destroyed him with an infernal knife. There where his limbs had been cut piecemeal by the Titan steel, the end of his life was the beginning of a new life as Dionysos. He appeared in another shape, and changed into many forms : now young like crafty Kronides (Cronides) [Zeus] shaking the aegis-cape, now as ancient Kronos (Cronus) heavy-kneed, pouring rain. Sometimes he was a curiously formed baby, sometimes like a mad youth with the flower of the first down marking his rounded chin with black. Again, a mimic lion he uttered a horrible roar in furious rage from a wild snarling throat, as he lifted a neck shadowed by a thick mane, marking his body on both sides with the self-striking whip of a tail which flickered about over his hairy back. Next, he left the shape of a lion's looks and let out a ringing neigh, now like an unbroken horse that lifts his neck on high to shake out the imperious tooth of the bit, and rubbing, whitened his cheek with hoary foam. Sometimes he poured out a whistling hiss from his mouth, a curling horned serpent covered with scales, darting out his tongue from his gaping throat, and leaping upon the grim head of some Titan encircled his neck in snaky spiral coils. Then he left the shape of the restless crawler and became a tiger with gay stripes on his body; or again like a bull emitting a counterfeit roar from his mouth he butted the Titanes with sharp horn. So he fought for his life, until Hera with jealous throat bellowed harshly through the air--that heavy-resentful step-mother! And the gates of Olympus rattled in echo to her jealous throat from high heaven. Then the bold bull collapsed: the murderers each eager for his turn with the knife chopt piecemeal the bull-shaped Dionysos [Zagreus].

After the first Dionysos had been slaughtered, Father Zeus learnt the trick of the mirror with its reflected image. He attacked the mother [Gaia the Earth] of the Titanes with avenging brand, and shut up the murderers of horned Dionysos within the gate of Tartaros [after a long war]: the trees blazed, the hair of suffering Gaia (Earth) was scorched with heat. He kindled the East: the dawnlands of Baktria (Bactria) blazed under blazing bolts, the Assyrian waves est afire the neighbouring Kaspiion (Caspian) Sea and the Indian mountains, the Red Sea rolled billows of flame and warmed Arabian Nereus. The opposite West also fiery Zeus blasted with the thunderbolt in love for his child; and under the foot of Zephyros (the West Wind) the western brine half-burn spat out a shining stream; the Northern ridges--even the surface of the frozen Northern Sea bubbled and burned: under the clime of snowy Aigokeros (Aegocerus) the Southern corner boiled with hotter sparks. Now Okeanos (Oceanus) poured rivers of tears from his watery eyes, a libation of suppliant prayer. Then Zeus clamed his wrath at the sight of the scorched earth; he pitied her, and wished to wash with water the ashes of ruin and the fiery wounds of the land. Then Rainy Zeus covered the whole sky with clouds and flooded all the earth [i.e. in the Great Deluge]."

Nonnus, Dionysiaca 10. 290 ff :

"[Dionysos] cried out to Kronides (Cronides) [Zeus] his father : ' . . . When I was a little one, Rhea who is still my nurse told me that you gave lightning to Zagreus, the first Dionysos, before he could speak plain--gave him your fiery lance and rattling thunder and showers of rain out of the sky, and he was another Rainy Zeus while yet a babbling baby.'"

Nonnus, Dionysiaca 24. 43 ff :

"[The Indian river Hydaspes cries out for mercy after being set ablaze by Dionysos :] 'The stream you have crossed is no stranger to your name for I have washed another Dionysos in my bath, with the same name as the younger Bromios, when Kronion (Cronion) [Zeus] entrusted Zagreus to the care of my nursing Nymphai (Nymphs); why, you have the whole shape of Zagreus. Grant this favour then, although so long after, to him from whom you are sprung; for you came from the heart of that first born Dionysos, so celebrated [i.e. Zeus swallowed Zagreus' heart before having intercourse with Semele].'"

Nonnus, Dionysiaca 31. 28 ff :

"[Hera asks Persephone to send an Erinys to drive Dionysos mad :] Away she went to the gloomy all-welcoming court of Haides; there she found Persephone, and told her a crafty tale : 'Most happy I call you, that you dwell so far from the gods! You have not seen Semele at home in Olympus. Hear I may

you, that you dwell so far from the gods! You have not seen Semele at home in Olympus. I hear I may yet see Dionysos, one born of a mortal womb, master of the lightning after Zagreus [Persephone's son], or lifting the thunderbolt in earth-born hands . . . He [Zeus] rescued Semele's son [Dionysos] from the flaming fire, he saved Bakkhos (Bacchus) from the thunderbolt, while still a baby brat . . . But Zagreus the heavenly Dionysos he would not defend, when he was cut up with knives! What made me angrier still, was that Kronides (Cronides) gave the starry heaven to Semele for a bridegift,--and Tartaros to Persephoneia! Heaven is reserved for Apollon, Hermes lives in heaven--and you have this abode full of gloom! What good was it that he put on the deceiving shape of a serpent, and ravished the girdle of your inviolate maidenhood, if after bed he was to destroy your babe? Lord Zeus holds the starry hall on Olympus; he has given the briny sea to his brother [Poseidon] the water king for his prerogative; he has given the cloudy house of darkness to your consort [Hades]. Come now, arm your Erinyes (Furies) against wineface Bakkhos, that I may not see a bastard and a mortal king of Olympus . . . Be the avenger of my sorrow . . . Let not Athens sing hymns to a new Dionysos, let him not have equal honour with Eleusinian Dionysos, let him not take over the rites of Iakkhos (Iacchus) who was there before him, let not his vintage dishonour Demeter's basket!'

The whole mind of Persephoneia was perturbed while she spoke, babbling deceit as the false tears bedewed her cheeks. Goddess bowed assent to goddess, and gave her [the Erinyes] Megaira to go with her, that with her evil eye she might fulfil the desire of Hera's jealous heart."

Nonnus, Dionysiaca 36. 119 ff :

"Let not Zeus be angry again for lateborn Bakkhos [Dionysos] as for Zagreus, and set the whole earth ablaze with his fire a second time, and pour down showers of rain through the air to flood the circuit of the eternal universe. I hope I may not behold the sea in the sky and Selenes (the Moon's) car soaking; may Phaethon [Helios the Sun] never again have his fiery radiance cooled."

Nonnus, Dionysiaca 38. 206 ff :

"Hermes keeps his rod and wears not his father's [Zeus'] aegis, lifts not his father's fiery lightning. But you will say--'He gave Zagreus the flash of the thunderbolt.' Yes, Zagreus held the thunderbolt, and came to his death! Take good care, my child, that you too suffer not woes like this."

Nonnus, Dionysiaca 39. 70 ff :

"I have heard how Zeus once gave his throne and the sceptre of Olympus as prerogative to Zagreus the ancient Dionysos--lightning to Zagreus, vine and wineface to Dionysos."

Nonnus, Dionysiaca 44. 198 ff :

"Persephone was arming her Erinyes (Furies) [against Pentheus] for the pleasure of Dionysos Zagreus, and in wrath helping Dionysos his late born brother."

Nonnus, Dionysiaca 48. 41 ff :

"[Gaia incites the Gigantes against Dionysos :] 'Wound him [Dionysos] with cutting steel and kill him for me like Zagreus, that one may say, god or mortal, that Gaia (the Earth) in her anger has twice armed her slayers against the breed of Kronides (Cronides)--the older Titanes (Titans)against the former Dionysos [Zagreus], the younger Gigantes (Giants) against Dionysos later born.'"

Nonnus, Dionysiaca 48. 962 ff :

"They [the Athenians] honoured him [Iakkhos (Iacchus) the third Dionysos] as a god next after the son of Persephoneia [Zagreus the first Dionysos], and after Semele's son [Dionysos the second]; they established sacrifices for Dionysos lateborn and Dionysos first born, and third they chanted a new hymn for Iakkhos (Iacchus). In these three celebrations Athens held high revel; in the dance lately made, the Athenians beat the step in honour of Zagreus and Bromios and Iakkhos all together."

Suidas s.v. Zagreus (trans. Suda On Line) (Byzantine Greek lexicon C10th A.D.) :

"Zagreus Dionysos in poets. For Zeus, it seems, had intercourse with Persephone, and she gave birth to Dionysos Khthonios (Chthonic)."

THE GOD SABAZIUS

Sabazios was a Phrygian god identified with Dionysos and the Orphic Zagreus.

Strabo, Geography 10. 3. 15 (trans. Jones) (Greek geographer C1st B.C. to C1st A.D.) :

"Sabazios (Sabazius) also belongs to the Phrygian group [of ministers of the rites of Rhea and Dionysos] and in a way is the child of the Mother [Rhea], since he too transmitted the rites of Dionysos."

Strabo, Geography 10. 3. 18 :

"Just as in all other respects the Athenians continue to be hospitable to things foreign, so also in their worship of the gods; for they welcomed so many of the foreign rites . . . the Phrygian [rites of Rhea-Kybele] [were mentioned] by Demosthenes, when he casts the reproach upon Aeschines' (Aeschines') mother and Aeschines himself that he was with her when she conducted initiations, that he joined her in leading the Dionysiac march, and that many a time he cried out 'evoe saboe,' and 'hyes attes, attes hyes'; for these words are in the ritual of Sabazios and the Mother [Rhea]."

Suidas s.v. Sabazios (trans. Suda On Line) (Byzantine Greek lexicon C10th A.D.) :

"Sabazios (Sabazius) : He is the same [god] as Dionysos. He acquired this form of address from the rite pertaining to him; for the barbarians call the bakkhic cry *sabazein*. Hence some of the Greeks too follow suit and call the cry *sabasmos*; thereby Dionysos [becomes] Sabazios. They also used to call *saboi* those places that had been dedicated to him and his Bakkhantes (Bacchantes)."

Suidas s.v. Saboi :

"Saboi : Demosthenes [in the speech] *On Behalf of Ktesiphon* [mentions them]. Some say that Saboi is the term for those who are dedicated to Sabazios (Sabazius), that is to Dionysos, just as those [dedicated] to Bakkhos (Bacchus) [are] Bakkhoi (Bacchi). They say that Sabazios and Dionysos are the same. Thus some also say that the Greeks call the Bakkhoi Saboi. But Mnaseas of Patrai says that Sabazios is the son of Dionysos."

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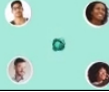
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